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ABSTRACT

A developmental course in Career and Life Planning (CLP) is discussed in terms of the value it can hold for black college students in translating their education into an effective career path. A systematic, group process approach, the CLP is described in relation to the following steps: (1) development of self-awareness; (2) development of a career personality profile; (3) selection of four careers and projection of them into the future; (4) development of a career desires profile; (5) practice of resume writing; (6) practice of employment interviewing; and (7) preparation for continued career growth. (JH)

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Career and Life Planning for Blacks

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Career and Life Planning

For Black students to translate their education into an effective career path there is currently a clear-cut educational dilemma. Even though academic degrees and professional training have traditionally been viewed as a guarantee of automatic employment, right now this is not the case necessarily. Finding meaningful and satisfying employment today is an arduous process, involving many hidden nuances, such as creating desirable impressions, knowing influential people, or merely being in the right place at the right time. In such a competitive job market it is essential, then, that Black students not only prepare themselves academically for a desired career, but also that they plan a course of action, while in college, to realistically enhance their chances of achieving vocational and life goals.

In brief, the Black student may be confronted with a series of questions such as these: (1) Do I see the many career possibilities available to someone with my skills and experiences? (2) Do I perceive growth potential and advancement opportunity in my designated career? (3) How effective are my resume and job interviewing skills? (4) Do I perceive stereotyped attitudes toward Blacks in prospective employers?

Answering these questions, naturally, can not be an arbitrary one-time process. It will require getting honestly in touch with oneself, appraising personal skills, researching trends and attitudes in the market place, and consulting with qualified resource persons to set up realistic expectations. One means for condensing all these necessary activities has been called "Career and Life Planning," offered under similar titles at many colleges and universities.

One such Career and Life Planning (CLP) course has been continually offered at The University of West Florida since 1971. Also having been offered as a workshop, this course has proven quite practical and effective in promoting personal growth, vocational planning, and preparation for the career entry particularly with Black students. Throughout CLP students frequently meet in small groups led by a trained facilitator. Outside the group, however, an individual can benefit from the CLP experience, by direct one-to-one consultation and counseling. Generally, however, CLP is a systematic group-process approach which follows a series of eight developmental steps. "Process" here is the key word because the concern is for a flexible, dynamic development of an employable person, following self-set guidelines that may change periodically. The CLP process steps are as follows:

Step 1: Self-Awareness: The individual gains self-knowledge through a series of self-awareness activities. Who am I? What are my personal characteristics, traits, and needs? How do other people see me? What are my assets and liabilities? Standardized personality tests are sometimes used to help answer these questions.

Step 2: Career Personality Profile: Using the self-knowledge gained from Step 1, the individual focuses on personal traits which are pertinent in the world of work. These traits (e.g., preference for close contact with people; liking out-of-doors) are arranged in a hierarchical order to increase the possibility of job satisfaction.

Step 3: Settling on Four Careers: Four tentative career choices are made through information obtained from various career information sources such as: The Occupational Outlook Handbook and Dictionary of Occupational Titles, as well as "career brainstorming" exercises and feedback from small group members. Standard vocational tests (like the Strong-Campbell) are frequently used as a resource in the selection of four careers.

Step 4: Projecting Those Four Careers Into the Future: The participants select two long-term life goals and predict how a particular career would affect such goals. Participants also imagine the direction the world may take in 10 or 20 years, especially as the world relates to potential career choices.

Step 5: Developing a Career Desires Profile: Each individual determines desired characteristics for jobs such as: income, benefits, job conditions, and opportunity for advancement. One specific career, based on future outlook, personal interviews with career persons (for more information see the article "Researching Your Career" in the August/September 1982 issue of THE BLACK COLLEGIAN) and desired job characteristics, is determined. These personal interviews clarify self-concept by allowing comparison with established career role models.

Step 6: Preparation of a Resume: Guidelines for preparing a resume are geared to the specific career. Sample resumes and cover letters are constructed, using the many resume writing sources available as models.

Step 7: Preparation for the Employment Interview: Participants

practice the employment interview with a professional interviewer. If possible, this segment is video taped and reviewed for feedback. Placement offices have samples of the most frequently asked questions during a job interview. These questions may be studied and possible responses practiced.

Step 8: Preparing for Subsequent Careers: Personal and career growth

are considered crucial to continued job satisfaction. How can I advance in my career? How can I upgrade my current skills or develop new ones? What are my possible career alternatives?

Despite the many concerns Black students may experience about their career choices, systematic planning definitely helps them both in determining and in achieving personal career goals. The CLP model offers a proven effective means to that end.

One of these concerns for Black college students is the erroneous pursuit of "trendy" job-preparation programs. CLP offers opportunity again to look into long-range projections for employment in such popular fields, often discovering that the job market may be experiencing a glut of college-trained job seekers at the time the undergraduate Black expects to enter it. On the other hand, there is the Black student who is merely attending college as a goal in itself. Such a student benefits from a CLP approach by discovering something to strive for, by actually defining a specific purpose for which to use his/her college education.

Finally, the CLP experience in obtaining vital information about one's career field and presenting oneself effectively in the job interview fosters both Competence and Confidence; two widely recognized ingredients of employment success. Thus, as Black students decide what they want, and then plan to "go for it," they will do it with all the talent, ability, and industriousness that has been clarified in CLP. This enhanced attitude of assertiveness will expand career opportunities.

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